

# Spilling the T: the State of Transgender People in America in 2025

By Milo Sanders

*Some names have been changed for privacy.*

## FEAR

I sat down in my assigned seat and buckled up. “Welcome to Delta airlines. Time to sit back and relax,” the words read on the screen next to the picture of a blond, white woman wearing headphones and a perfect, glossy smile. I opened snapchat on my phone and prepared to take a photo to let my partners know I was ready to take off. But as I looked at myself reflected backward on my screen, I suddenly felt a wave of panic. I was wearing a black flat-bill cap over long purple hair. My cheeks and chin were still round and feminine, but suddenly I saw the harder edge that eight weeks of testosterone had carved. I was wearing a hoodie to hide the shape of my body, but my hips couldn’t lie. My watch, advertised as a man’s watch, was fastened around my very girly wrist. I looked like a person who couldn’t decide if they were a girl or a boy. I looked *trans*.

My heart started beating too fast. “I look visibly queer and I’m going to Oklahoma City,” I texted my partner. “I don’t feel so good. Why did I dress so gay today?”

“I think you will be okay,” my girlfriend assured me.

I spent several minutes trying not to focus on the place I was going to be spending the weekend, of the people I knew there who were not accepting of my identity. I closed my eyes

and thought of my twin and xyr spouse and four children, who loved me and accepted me. I would not be going into many public spaces.

My twin, Mara, and I, both identify as non-binary and use neo-pronouns—at least, I do when I'm in Seattle and Boston, and my twin does when xe is at home and among close friends. To most people though, including our parents and siblings, Mara is just a “tomboy.” I'm not actually sure if my parents know I am non-binary. I haven't talked to them in over a year, and I'm not planning on breaking that silence just because we are in the same state for first time in two years.

When I landed in Oklahoma City, Mara picked me up and drove us to xyr home. I saw flags at half-mast. “They're for Charlie Kirk,” Mara said.

Two days before, Charlie Kirk had been assassinated. His followers were rushing to blame a transgender shooter. “Transgender people are a domestic terrorist threat,” JD Vance shouted, making headlines across multiple news sites.

Only a week later, a trans person was not found to be behind Charlie Kirk's murder, but it didn't matter. The transphobic comments had been posted. People weren't afraid to say hateful things about transgender people, because the scene has been set for it to be acceptable.

The Trump administration has been attacking too many things to count in our country this year—rolled back DEI initiatives, allowing Robert F. Kennedy to be a in position of power to say harmful and untruthful things about healthcare. They made healthcare harder to access for low-income families, attacked abortion rights, same-sex marriage rights, and so much more. For my family and friends and the many other people living across America, the rise in vitriol

against the transgender community has felt especially targeted. I set out on a journey to meet others in my community, to learn how other transgendered people are feeling and dealing with this dangerous shift. Where are we headed in this country? Can we afford to stay in a place that doesn't welcome us? Who is standing with us? Is there room for hope?

A pivotal moment I can point to is the day Trump re-entered the White House on January 20, 2025. One of Trump's first acts was to sign an action "defending women from gender ideology extremism and restoring biological truth to the federal government." In the name of "defending women," Trump declared that a person's born body parts determined if they were a man or a woman, and saying otherwise is wrong. Simply put, this action denied the existence of trans and non-binary people. This has had profound effects across the United States. According to translegislation.com, in 2025, 1,011 bills have been introduced that restrict trans people from "receiving healthcare, education, legal recognition, and the right to publicly exist." 124 of these bills have passed.

These bills are just a representation of the hate and violence that has risen in the United States in the past few months. Thousands of transgender people, especially those in government positions, have lost their jobs because of how they identify, which also means loss of access to healthcare and the inability to pay for housing, groceries, and other fundamental needs. There are reports of 41 transgender and gender non-conforming people killed due to violence in 2025.

Transgender people are afraid, and we have reason to be.

Much of what is talked about in the news relates specifically to trans women—women who were assigned male at birth and identify differently now that they understand themselves. But “transgender” can apply to anyone who doesn’t see their gender as the one they were assigned at birth: trans women, trans men, gender fluid, and two-spirit are just some of the more specific terms that fit under the trans umbrella. A person doesn’t have to be “out” to be considered transgender—nor do they have to have socially or medically transitioned. Many non-binary people consider themselves transgender because one cannot be assigned non-binary at birth.

Approximately 1 percent of the U.S. population identifies as transgender. This percentage is predicted to rise as Gen Z, who was raised with less transphobia, feels the safety and capacity to identify authentically. One study found that while only .8 percent of adults identify as transgender, 3.3 percent of teenagers do. But if this wave of transphobia persists, the numbers could go down again as it becomes unsafe to come out.

I met Mike (named changed for anonymity) at their home on a rainy October day, and I quickly learned that we had more in common than just identifying as non-binary. We both have family in Oklahoma and spent a lot of our childhood there. While Mike, like me, is willing to spend a small amount of time with their family in Oklahoma, they draw the line at visiting their dad, who lives in Texas. It’s not because they don’t like their dad—but with anti-trans laws being passed in Texas, it’s unsafe to be visibly “out” in that state. Although Mike has lived in Massachusetts for 17 years, they’re very aware of the laws in Texas because they are employed by a hospital in Fort Worth. They feel very fortunate to be able to work one hundred percent remotely from their basement. “These people keep trying to make identifying as transgender a

felony,” Mike told me, referring to the overwhelmingly loud conservative voices in Texas legislature. “If they do that, I don’t know what that means for my job. I have asked my employer, and they are confident that it’s not a problem, but you can’t be a felon and practice medicine.” Texas recently passed a bathroom law that states public restrooms may only be used by the person’s gender stated at birth—which allows for many people who don’t look “male” or “female” “enough” to be challenged in restrooms across the state.

Mike has been medically transitioning for 8 years—thanks to HRT (hormone replacement therapy), they have a beard, and thanks to surgery they have a flat chest; for social transition, they wear flannel shirts and ball caps. They feel they can’t contain their gender in just one or two words; “I am both, I am all, I am none,” they told me. But they pass as a cis white man in almost every setting, and they lean into that identity for their safety, grateful that they have the ability to go “stealth”. “I used to present less masculinely here [in rural Massachusetts], when I was feeling secure, but not now.” In a restaurant in rural Oklahoma, Mike’s mom misgendered them. Mike jumped on the alert, hoping that other patrons around them would assume their mother had dementia instead of suspecting they were trans. “You could get me killed,” they told their mom.

## SAFETY

Seven weeks after my flight to Oklahoma, I caught a plane to a completely different destination—Seattle, Washington. When I landed at SEA-TAC, my biggest problem was that I couldn’t remember how to get to the rideshare area of the vast parking garage. When I’m in Seattle, I have a sense of security. My family is there—my partners, my children, my friends. The local coffee shops have openly queer baristas and gender-neutral bathrooms. My favorite

bookstore has displays of trans-affirming books. Rainbow crosswalks aren't being torn up here. I walk down the street in my neighborhood, or drive down the street in downtown Seattle, and I see pride flags and stickers. No one in this city has batted an eye about my presentation, my pronouns, or who I hold hands with. It is my home. When I finish grad school in Boston in the next year, I can't wait to return to Seattle for good. But I know that I am privileged, and at any moment that safety could be taken away. My family and I contemplate with every article that comes out against trans people, is this the push that we need to leave? Will even Seattle become unsafe for us now?

Many trans people don't see a path forward in this country right now. They are choosing instead to leave—if they can. Sarah Kate Smigiel, known as justsaysk on Instagram, uses their platform to help trans people get the funds they need to relocate. As of October 1, 2025, they raised enough money for 33 trans folks to move to “safer” states or leave the country, but they say that dozens more are still asking them for help. “I’m actively saving to be able to move/seek refuge in Germany,” one of their followers said. “What are some steps I need to take to be considered [for your aid]? I’ve done extensive research into everything I need to do to get there.”

The government has hindered the mobility of transgender people, even though it has made it clear they don't want us here, either. Another effect of Trump's signed action “defending women” was a challenge of gender markers on passports. A prior policy had allowed non-binary people to put “X” as their gender marker and trans people to change their gender marker to the gender they identified with. However, now all passports this year are being issued with the gender a person was labeled at birth, including reverting the gender marker of trans

people who have applied to get their passports renewed. Passports with "X" markers are deemed invalid. While the ACLU challenged these actions, the Supreme Court upheld the administration's stance on passports on November 6, 2025.

Some non-binary people have seen little problem from this, fortunately. TSA agents will pretend they don't see the "X" marker or wave them through security anyway. When I change my legal name and have to update my passport, my gender marker will legally need to remain F. As I continue to look less and less like a woman, I wonder and fear how this will affect my travel.

Even if they could leave the country, some aren't sure there are any better options. Will Hemingway (name changed for anonymity) found security by moving from small-town Michigan to Boston, and he feels the pressure to succeed in the big city so he won't have to move back in with his parents after grad school. In Boston, Hemingway mourns the lack of many things: his sewing machine, his dogs, his coworkers at Vans who accepted him as he was. But at 23 years old and living on his own for the first time, he's excited to explore what it means to be fully out and plan the next steps of his journey in a way that he couldn't in Michigan.

"I'm not sure if there's anywhere I could go [outside the U.S.]," Hemingway told me. "I'm mentally unstable, so, as much as I would want to find somewhere outside of the U.S., I could feel more secure about my rights, I want to first make sure I can, ya know, maintain being a self-sufficient human being first." He continues to work at Vans and explore the queer community in Boston while working toward a graduate degree and a book publishing deal, hopefully one that can fund his medical transition.

## COMMUNITY

“So do you have a support system here?” I asked Mike.

“No,” Mike answered immediately.

Their two dogs were snoozing in front of the fire on a gigantic dog bed. Floor-to-ceiling windows revealed a dozen trees in their magnificent, autumnal glory. The day was rainy and dull, but the yellow leaves were brilliant. It felt like a beautiful, serene place to live. But Mike and their family don’t see it that way.

Mike lives in Massachusetts, which is labeled a “blue” state, and to many, that means that any place in Massachusetts would be more friendly toward queer people. But Mike and their family know that, especially in this last year, that’s not the case. Trump supporters live in Mike’s rural neighborhood, and they are speaking their mind in a way they hadn’t before this year. “They think it’s okay to be open...running around wearing whatever offensive clothing,” Mike said. Because of the open hate, Mike and their family have to close themselves off and retreat. “So how is this better than living in Oklahoma?” I asked.

“I don’t know, they have fewer guns up here, I guess?” Mike gave an awkward laugh. Unsurprisingly, they told me that they and their wife have been planning to move for a while now, and this year feels like the time to finally take that step.

With Boston up to an hour away depending on traffic (and a little over an hour if you take the commuter rail, as I did), Mike doesn’t go into the big city often. They used to attend a transmasc support group called Compass downtown, but traffic and timing became too difficult to navigate with work and children to also take care of. Then, because of the pandemic,

Compass was moved to completely online. “Their discord server is pretty active,” Mike says. For now, they rely on the virtual support of Compass and others, when they don’t see anyone like them for miles around.

Mike has three children still at home, with one identifying as gender-non-conforming. Mike and their wife have considered leaving the United States altogether, but they feel tied here for now because of their children. Their children’s other parents (from Mike and their wife’s previous marriages) are still in the U.S., and their seventeen-year-old is applying to colleges in New England. They mentioned many places in the U.S. where they have found queer community—when visiting Philadelphia and Denver, for example, they had a sense of peace and ease they don’t feel in their current home, and that’s where they’re looking to move. Mike and their wife are fortunate that they work in the medical field, where their jobs are in high demand across the country, and they have their choice of locations.

Another member of Compass, Vito Honey, wears a NASCAR coat and confident masculine stance—there’s no denying he’s a man to those who come across him. He doesn’t rely on the transmasc support group like he used to when he first started transitioning. He says that Compass is great for those who are wanting to explore what it means to be trans and how to socially and medically transition, but now, five years into HRT, he’s more comfortable in his body. His greatest sense of community is his brotherhood, the fraternity of Delta Sigma Pi, which he originally joined when he was in undergrad in Michigan. He reaches out to the local alumni chapter whenever he’s looking for a new job or to join a new area, and they always come through for him and check in with him. He thinks that in a lot of cases, trans men don’t find queer groups the way other queer people do, but they still strive for a community. “I think

sometimes we haven't built those [trans-specific] groups because once we find a friend group that's accepting that we're trans, or if they don't know we're trans, we don't necessarily need that." Honey has lived across the United States from Los Angeles to Detroit, and he says he finds Boston to be one of the safest for trans people. Now living in Jamaica Plain, he doesn't feel the need to move any more.

N.V. Gay, author of *The Trans Allies Bible*, has many friends who have left the country or moved to more progressive areas due to fear. But like Honey, she doesn't want to move, and she's prepared to stay and fight. "I was born in Ohio. I have lived in this state for most of my life. I should not have to feel like I have to flee my own home," she says. Her primary mission is to build a community across the country—one ally at a time. "We need to see we're not alone in this fight, because the second we feel alone, we're done, we're lost."

It feels like an eternal balance of finding community where we are—a group of people who will support the trans experience—and knowing when it's time to leave and find a safer home. The government's actions aren't what drive us, it's about the personal connections we have, and if we can find them in real life, or have to find them online.

"The (American) trans experience of waking up every morning wondering if your government declared you a terrorist or invalidated your passport while you were asleep," laments Renee Lenore, known as le.renee.sance on Threads, drily. The weight of the transphobia that we see, hear, and feel, can be crushing. But even this dark social media post was a way into the light—letting others know that they are not alone, and that we are all here,

in this struggle, together. It got hundreds of likes, and other posts that share the trans experience are posted across social media platforms every day.

## AUTHENTICITY

Honey can't afford top surgery this year, and sometimes he wonders if the hassle of it is even worth it. It won't make him less trans to stay the way that he is, and he is out and proud even without any gender-affirming surgery. He knows that living with purpose and as himself is the only way forward. He has his passport ready if it becomes illegal for him to live in the United States, but he's not dwelling on the circumstances that may lead up to that. "If we let ourselves live in fear all the time, we will make ourselves physically and mentally ill," Honey says, and I think he is right. We can't let ourselves be controlled by the way other people react to trans people—that's their problem, not ours.

Erica Vogel, a trans activist and author of *Advice from Your Trans Aunty*, has witnessed significant change in the trans landscape over her lifetime. She reminded me of just how far our nation has come in the past ten years, and told me that when we focus on the victories, and not the overwhelming hate coming out of localized areas, it's easier to see hope in this country.

"My advice for trans people is, first and foremost, keep going," encouraged Vogel. Living near Washington DC, she says, has given her a perspective on the federal government's actions, and she sees positive change despite the fear-mongering headlines. "Keep showing up, keep demanding [our rights], keep taking up space....progress is slow and we are making progress against this administration, it just doesn't look like it."

So what does this mean for trans people in America today? “No fear,” say Kai Erin, posting as kai.karenthea on Threads. “Or at least no more today than yesterday or the day before. And certainly not enough to make me stop being myself.”

I’ve only identified as transgender for part of 2025. For two years before that, I acknowledged that I was non-binary, but I didn’t feel trans “enough” to use the label until I started my weekly testosterone injections. And for 35 years before that, I thought I was just really bad at being a woman. There are days, like when I’m traveling, when I wonder what possessed me to start medically transitioning, when I think how much easier my life would be if I continued to present feminine and not socially transition. But then I think back to my childhood and young adult life in Oklahoma, never feeling like I fit anywhere, unaccepted by everyone, including my own self. I think of the often-painful journey I went through to understand who I am and how I want people to perceive me. I think of the community I have cultivated in Seattle and in Boston. I know there is no other option for me but to continue living out and proud of myself. The euphoria of living authentically overwhelms even the darkest of times. Transgender people are here and always have been, and we will not stop living our lives because someone in the White House says we do not exist.